

Planning Analysis: The Theory of Citizen Participation

Introduction

Citizen participation is a process which provides private individuals an opportunity to influence public decisions and has long been a component of the democratic decision-making process. The roots of citizen participation can be traced to ancient Greece and Colonial New England. Before the 1960s, governmental processes and procedures were designed to facilitate "external" participation. Citizen participation was institutionalized in the mid-1960s with President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs (Cogan & Sharpe, 1986 p. 283).

Public involvement is means to ensure that citizens have a direct voice in public decisions. The terms "citizen" and "public," and "involvement" and "participation" are often used interchangeably. While both are generally used to indicate a process through which citizens have a voice in public policy decisions, both have distinctively different meanings and convey little insight into the process they seek to describe. Mize reveals that the term "citizen participation" and it's relationship to public decision-making has evolved without a general consensus regarding either it's meaning nor it's consequences (Mize, 1972).

Many agencies or individuals choose to exclude or minimize public participation in planning efforts claiming citizen participation is too expensive and time consuming. Yet, many citizen participation programs are initiated in response to public reaction to a proposed project or action. However, there are tangible benefits that can be derived from an effective citizen involvement program. Cogan and Sharpe (1986, p. 284) identify five benefits of citizen participation to the planning process:

- Information and ideas on public issues;
- Public Support for planning decisions;
- Avoidance of protracted conflicts and costly delays;
- Reservoir of good will which can carry over to future decisions; and
- Spirit of cooperation and trust between the agency and the public.

All of these benefits are important to the Forest Service in its planning efforts, particularly the last three. Recent forest management decisions have led to prolonged court cases and a general lack of trust among many people with respect to the Forest Service.

Decision-making Structures

In discussing the theory of public participation, it is useful to review broad theories of decision-making structures. DeSario and Langton, in their book *Citizen Participation in Public Decision Making* explore the role of technology in public policy decisions (DeSario and Langton, 1987). They conclude that public decisions are increasingly being influenced by technology. Two broad decision-making structures are defined and analyzed: the technocratic approach; and the democratic approach.

Technocracy (or the technocratic approach) is defined as the application of technical knowledge, expertise, techniques, and methods to problem solving. Democracy, as defined by DeSario and Langton,

refers to citizen involvement activities in relation to government planning and policy making (DeSario and Langton, 1987 p. 5). These approaches are described in more detail below.

Technocratic Decision Making

The technocratic approach to decision-making has historically been applied in most Forest Service decisions. Strong arguments can be made in favor of a technocratic decision approach. A key argument is that trained staff "experts" are best suited to make complex technical decisions. Experts are increasingly becoming a part of our decision-making structures in both the public and private sectors (DeSario and Langton, 1987. p. 7). However, Nelkin concluded that scientific and technocratic approaches "not only failed to solve social problems but often contributed to them" (Nelkin, 1981. p. 274). The notion that the "cure is often worse than the disease" becomes increasingly important as the technology provides alternative solutions to public policy issues.

Techniques and methods applied by experts are most effective when considering technical decisions as opposed to value or mixed, decisions. Kantrowitz (1975) identified three separate types of policy decisions: (1) technical decisions that are based solely on the application and extrapolation of scientific issues; (2) value decisions are concerned with the resolution of important normative or societal issues; and (3) mixed decisions that have both technical and value components. Technical decisions rely on scientific techniques and extrapolations to determine the potential of "what is". Value issues involve normative determinations of "what should be". Although scientific information can provide guidance with respect to value decisions, it is rarely the sole determinant (DeSario and Langton, 1987. p. 8).

Natural resource management decisions frequently affect social values. The technocratic approach to decision making is difficult to apply successfully to social problems because social goals are often complex, conflicting and unclear (DeSario and Langton, 1987 p. 9). According to Kantrowitz: "the problem for experts is that the issues they most frequently confront when addressing social problems are 'mixed decisions'—decisions involving both technical and value judgements" (Kantrowitz, 1975 p. 506).

A growing number of Americans are becoming more skeptical of technology and its experts. One result of this skepticism is a heightened demand for greater citizen participation with respect to technological decisions (DeSario and Langton, 1987 p. 11). As a result, technological progress will face increased public scrutiny as the deficiencies of technology and experts become more apparent. The integration of the technocratic and democratic approaches, particularly in natural resource management, has led to an increasing sense of frustration and futility for both the public and the government agencies involved (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989). These and a variety of related factors indicate there is a growing need for decision-making processes at all levels of government that allow agencies to successfully integrate the public's demand for greater input while incorporating the agency's expertise and desire for efficiency.

Democratic Decision Making

Democratic decision-making, in contrast to bureaucratic or technocratic decision making, is based on the assumption that all who are affected by a given decision have the right to participate in the making of that decision. Participation can be direct in the classical democratic sense, or can be through representatives for their point of view in a pluralist-republican model (Kweit and Kweit, 1986 p. 22). Kweit and Kweit go on to point out that criteria for evaluating policies in a democratic process are the accessibility of the process and/or the responsiveness of the policy to those who are affected by it, rather than the efficiency or rationality of the decision.

Public Participation In Rational Policy Making

Many "rational" policy decisions are made using the policy analysis process. According to Lang, a decision is rational to the extent that it is shown empirically to match the best available means of

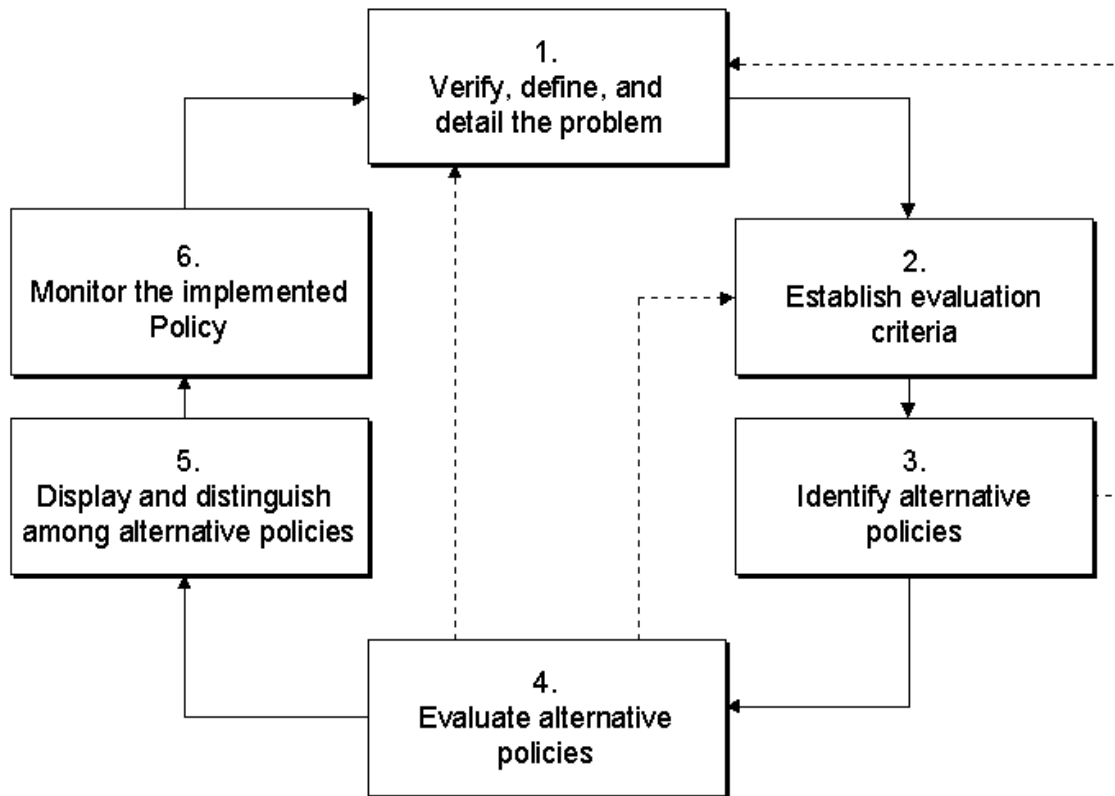
achieving a given end (Lang, 1986). Traditional rational planning and policy analysis processes typically have five or six steps. Patton and Sawicki outline six steps in the policy analysis process: (1) problem definition; (2) identification of goals and objectives; (3) development of alternatives; (4) development of evaluation criteria; (5) identification of the "best" alternative; and (6) monitoring and evaluation of the outcome (Patton and Sawicki, 1986, p.26) Figure A-1 shows a diagram of the policy analysis process.

Kweit and Kweit suggest that policy analysis tends concentrate power in the hands of a few experts and that policy analysis is most compatible with bureaucratic decision-making which is "antithetical to citizen participation" (Kweit and Kweit, 1986 p. 21). Because the policy analysis process relies on specialized techniques, expertise is an inherent component of policy analysis. As such, the role of citizen participation in the traditional policy analysis process is minimized. Citizens often lack technical expertise and can be emotionally involved in issues of concern rather than being detached and rational (Kweit and Kweit, 1986 p. 22).

For a number of reasons, a purely rational decision-making process is difficult. One major limitation inherent in the process is the lack of comprehensive information. However, input from citizen groups outside organizational boundaries can help provide more comprehensive information on all aspects of the policy analysis process. Kweit and Kweit state:

In a democracy, it is the public that determines where it wants to go, and the role of its representatives and bureaucratic staff is to get them there. In other words, *ends* should be chosen democratically even though the *means* are chosen technocratically (Kweit and Kweit, 1986 p. 25).

Figure A-1. The Policy Analysis Process



This statement has important implications with respect to Forest Service decisions. The existing policy structure within the agency mandates that targets (or the *ends*), which are tied directly to funding, are set by Congress. This would imply that the *ends* are chosen democratically. The targets are implemented on the Forest and District level. Thus, traditionally the *means* are developed and chosen technocratically.

Congress, as elected representatives, theoretically represents the public interest in setting targets. Recent issues with respect to forest management (i.e., spotted owl lawsuits) suggest that this approach is no longer effective in managing the National Forest system. On its face, this may seem to imply that the Forest Service should apply a purely technocratic decision-making process. However, it is unlikely that a purely technocratic (top-down) approach will continue to be appropriate given the number and diversity of public interests who have a stake in forest management decisions.

Lang, suggests that traditional comprehensive and strategic planning processes are insufficient for current resource management planning and advocates a more interactive approach to planning. Lang suggests:

An integrated approach to resource planning must provide for interaction with the stakeholders in the search for relevant information, shared values, consensus, and ultimately, proposed action that is both feasible and acceptable (Lang, 1986 p 35).

Lang suggests that conventional planning tends to be dominated by a technical/analytic style where the planner is a detached value-neutral expert advising decision makers about the best way to accomplish their goals and serve the public interest. The emphasis is on data collection and analysis as the means for finding the best solutions to problems and developing a technically sound plan. The implicit assumption is that better information leads to better decisions. Success in conventional planning is measured by the extent to which the objectives of the plan are achieved (Lang, 1986 p 39).

According to Lang, interactive planning is based on the assumption that open, participative processes lead to better decisions. The planner engages directly with stakeholders to gain support, build consensus, identify acceptable solutions, and secure implementation. Success in interactive planning is measured by the extent to which balance can be achieved among competing interests and consensus is reached on appropriate actions (Lang, 1986 p 39). Table 2-1 provides a comparison of interactive versus conventional planning.

Table 2-1. Interactive Planning v. Conventional Planning

Interactive Planning	Conventional Planning
<p>Includes information/feedback, consultation and negotiation</p> <p>Interaction occurs early on and throughout the planning process, with full range of stakeholders</p> <p>Assumes that open participation leads to better decisions</p> <p>Planner as value-committed advocate</p> <p>Focuses on mobilization of support</p> <p>Plan = what we agree to do</p> <p>Success measured by achievement of agreement on action</p>	<p>Limited information/feedback; maybe some consultation</p> <p>Early interaction with implementers; affected interests not involved until late in process</p> <p>Assumes that better information leads to better decisions</p> <p>Planner as value-neutral expert</p> <p>Focuses on manipulation of data</p> <p>Plan = what we should do</p> <p>Success measured by achievement of plan's objectives</p>

Source: Lang, 1986 p. 39

Finally, Lang suggests that much of planning practice is dominated by a perspective that is sometimes called "technical rationality." However, three other perspectives, in addition to the technical are central to resource planning. These are organizational, political, and personal (Lang, 1986 p 41). Lang notes that "multiple perspectives comprise an essential feature of integrated resource planning." Mitchell defines this to include sharing and coordinating the values and inputs of a broad range of agencies, publics, and other interests when conceiving, designing and implementing resource policies, programs or projects (Mitchell, 1987).

The literature suggests that it will become increasingly difficult for the Forest Service to continue with it's existing "top-down" decision-making structure. A wide variety of publics are active in following the agency's decisions from the national and regional level, down to the timber sale level. This increased level of scrutiny suggests that the agency will be held more accountable for decisions by interested publics. Further, the conflicts inherent in resource management decisions make an interactive approach to planning and decision-making an attractive alternative to the existing decision-making structure.

Principles Of Citizen Participation

A great deal of literature exists on the subject of citizen participation. A review of this literature indicates there are some commonly accepted principles that can be applied in the development and implementation of a citizen participation program. Cogan, Sharpe and Hertberg, in the book *The Practice of State and Regional Planning* provide a concise overview of citizen participation in the planning process (So, et al, 1986 p. 283-308). Following is a summary of their discussion.

Perceptions of Stakeholders and Planners

The perceptions of stakeholders and planners is an important consideration in the development and implementation of any public participation program. Public participation is often a requirement for planners, however, it is always optional for citizens. Citizens choose to participate because they expect a satisfying experience and hope to influence the planning process.

Cogan (p. 287) indicates that participation can offer a variety of rewards to citizens. These can be intrinsic to the involvement (through the very act of participation) or instrumental (resulting from the opportunity to contribute to public policy). The planner's expectations are also important in that an effective public participation program can lead to a better planning process and product as well as personal satisfaction.

Well-planned citizen involvement programs relate the expectations of both the citizens and the planner. Arnstein's "ladder of citizen participation" can assist the planner in determining his or her perceptions of a program's purpose and compare this with the anticipated perceptions of citizen participants (see Figure A-2).

In successful citizen involvement programs, the disparity between the planner's and the participant's expectations is minimal. If expectations are different, conflict is probable. This conflict is damaging to the planning process (as well as the agency's reputation), and to the relationship between the participants and the planner. Often, it is avoidable because it's source is in conflicting expectations rather than conflicting demands (Cogan, et al., 1986, p 287).

Figure A-2. The Ladder of Citizen Participation



Source: Arnstein, 1969

Clearly, citizen participation programs can increase costs and the amount of time a project takes. Further, as discussed above, there is a certain level of risk associated with citizen participation programs. However, Cogan suggests that citizen participation programs can make the planning process and planners more effective by:

- Reducing isolation of the planner from the public;
- Generating a spirit of cooperation and trust;
- Providing opportunities to disseminate information;
- Identifying additional dimensions of inquiry and research;
- Assisting in identifying alternative solutions;
- Providing legitimacy to the planning effort and political credibility of the agency; and
- Increasing public support.

Further, in certain polarized issues an effective public participation program may actually save time and money by insuring that the proposed solution is acceptable to all of the interested stakeholders.

Techniques of Citizen Participation

There are a variety of techniques available to planners to solicit public input in the planning process. These range from basic open meetings to more sophisticated techniques such as the Delphi and Nominal Group techniques (see Appendix B for a more detailed description of these techniques). Cogan states "with few exceptions, a successful public involvement program incorporates several techniques" (Cogan, et al. 1986 p. 292). These techniques can be graphically presented as a continuum that ranges from passive involvement to active involvement (Figure A-3). Cogan provides the following description of each of the forms of public involvement follows (Cogan, et al. 1986 p. 292-294).

- **Publicity** — Publicity techniques are designed to persuade and facilitate public support, relating to citizens as passive consumers.
- **Public Education** — Public education programs present relatively complete and balanced information so that citizens may draw their own conclusions.
- **Public Input** — Public input techniques solicit ideas and opinions from citizens. They are most effective when combined with feedback mechanisms which inform participants of the extent to which their input has influenced ultimate decisions.
- **Public Interaction** — Public interaction techniques facilitate the exchange of information and ideas among citizens, planners, and decision makers. When these techniques are effectively utilized, each participant has the opportunity to express his or her views, respond to the ideas of others, and work toward consensus.
- **Public Partnership** — Public partnerships offer citizens a formalized role in shaping the ultimate decisions.

Not all techniques fit exclusively into one category. For example, a public meeting may provide opportunities for education and interaction.

A key point Cogan makes is that the number of citizens who can be involved is inversely related to the level of active involvement. For example, public relations efforts can reach a larger number of citizens, while public partnership limits participation to a few (Cogan, et al. 1986, p. 293).

One of the stated goals of the Delta Showcase Project is to develop partnerships with individuals and groups. While this is clearly an achievable goal, the previous discussion indicates that the number of partnerships developed during the project will probably be small.

Figure A-3. Public Participation Continuum

Planning Act of 1974, and the National Forest Management Act of 1976. These acts also give the public a role in the planning and decision-making process of the National Forests (Sample, 1992).

The demand for use of National Forest resources have increased to the point where the Forest Service can no longer accommodate all uses at optimal levels without conflict (Krutilla and Haigh, 1978). Increasingly, conflicts arise between various interest groups—timber, recreation, environmental conservation and preservation. Over time, these conflicts have grown in significance and severity resulting in a stalemate of legal challenges that has forced the Forest Service to defend its decisions.

Public participation is one approach that the Forest Service can use to help generate consensus and approval in its decision-making. Working under the assumption that public consultation is becoming increasingly important in natural resource management issues and that it is generally desirable, we conclude our discussion with a review of the elements of an effective consultation program.

Priscoli & Homenuckm point out that demand for public consultation in policy and decision making is part of a larger movement that evolved from the 1960s. The initial question they raise is: who is the public? They categorize publics into five groups including: (1) the organized public; (2) the general public; (3) politicians; (4) public interest groups; and (5) local experts (Priscoli and Homenuckm, 1986 p 68).

The second issue is: who does each group represent? The answer is that some groups are not very representative, while other groups are highly organized and know how to lobby but may not reflect the views of the majority of the population. They emphasize these are reasons that it is essential a public consultation program be properly designed in order to establish a process which provides the opportunity for all views to be identified and incorporated into a decision-making process. The purpose of public consultation is to aid decision makers by ensuring that views are identified, questions raised, answers provided, and judgements supported (Priscoli and Homenuckm, 1986 p 69).

The third issue is with respect to the amount and form of consultation. Priscoli and Homenuckm identify six goals or objectives for public consultation (Priscoli and Homenuckm, 1986 p 70). While all are rarely achieved, mixes can be achieved:

1. To build credibility with those who will be affected, those who will pay and those who will use a project. This point doesn't have to be dwelled upon; everyone recognizes the credibility gap exists.
2. To identify public concerns and values. Many techniques do this in a forum that is relatively open and straightforward.
3. To develop consensus among the impacted parties, users and those who pay. In difficult controversies, consensus is rarely achieved but is very satisfying when it is.
4. To create the greatest number of "unsurprised" apathetics. In many cases not everybody needs involvement or wants to be involved. Most people are peripherally involved. These people should not be surprised, rather, they should be informed.
5. To produce better decisions. Public consultation can produce better "technical" decisions than a strictly technically oriented decision process.
6. To enhance democratic practice. The democratic ideology which underlies the North American political structure has as a principle tenet the right to participate in decision making. Public consultation allows and promotes participation, thus avoiding the further issue that can arise when the public is excluded from a decision-making process.

Priscoli and Homenuckm suggest that at a practical level, public consultation programs should strive to isolate and make visible the extremes. In other words, the program should create incentives for participants to find a middle ground (Priscoli and Homenuckm, 1986 p 70).

Conclusion

Public participation is one means of decreasing tension and conflict over public policy decisions. A variety of techniques exist that solicit public input effectively. Planners and participants can derive a number of tangible benefits from an effective public involvement process. However, the expectations of planners and the public must be roughly equivalent for the process to be effective.

Recent planning models such as the Interactive Planning process described by Lang, incorporate public input in all phases of the planning process. Theoretically, involving interested publics in all phases of planning and decision-making will lead to better decisions.

References

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